A STUDY ON THE ADOPTION OF FLEXIBLE LEARNING STRUCTURES IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Synopsis

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Realising one's full potential, creating a fair and just society, and advancing global progress all depend on education. The secret to India's continuous rise and leadership on the international stage in terms of economic growth, social fairness and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation is ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality education. The best method to develop and utilise our nation's many talents and resources for the benefit of the individual, society, the nation, and the world is through universal high-quality education. India will have the youngest people in the world over the next ten years, and the future of our nation will depend on our capacity to offer them chances for high-quality education. (education.gov.in)

The Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for Education 2030 (also known as the Education 2030 Agenda) acknowledges higher education as a vital driver for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4. The agenda underlines the role of higher education in facilitating and promoting access to opportunities for lifelong learning for all persons who are required for the development of inclusive communities, responsible citizenship, and a qualified workforce. The Education 2030 Agenda encourages nations to establish better-articulated and equitable higher education systems that support lifelong learning and offer flexible learning pathways to all students to guarantee that higher education is equipped to serve SDG 4.

Articulation is the movement of students between institutions, programmes, and levels of study.

Individuals and society gain greatly from articulated and adaptable education systems. For starters, they may better support equity, which is central to SDG 4, the Education 2030 Agenda, and national policies worldwide. Higher education can be better suited to accommodate non-traditional students who would otherwise be unable to benefit from it by lowering obstacles to entry and providing more flexible transfer options. Second, flexible learning paths can assist higher education systems in becoming more effective and efficient in carrying out their objectives and goals. Higher education offering that is flexible can better meet the different demands of both students and companies. It can also increase career opportunities and provide a feeling of fulfillment to individuals who are learning (Carlsen et al., 2016).

Third, a more defined yet flexible higher education system can lead to efficiency advantages.

Forexample, learners' past learning can be recognised and used for course exemptions or transferring across study programmes. This can assist in minimising the amount of time and money required to obtain a degree. It can help decrease dropouts in the learning process, allowing individuals to progress to greater levels of learning. At the same time, important changes in the global setting have lately impacted higher education institutions across the world. One of these has been the global exponential surge in demand for higher education. In response to social demand and quickly changing labour markets, the number of higher education institutions has expanded, as has the variety of institutions and programmes offered. Higher education institutions are beginning to differentiate themselves based on their status, origin, mission, and method of delivery. In their desire to establish sustainable knowledge economies and tackle social difficulties, governments throughout the world have prioritised increasing access to and enrollment in higher education (Jones and Field, 2013).

A combination of policy frameworks, policy tools, and specific policy actions to encourage alternative entrance routes and transfer possibilities in higher education can promote flexible learning paths and aid nations in their pursuit of SDG 4. Ensuring that students can access, progress through, and complete higher education necessitates a high level of coordination across educational levels, as well as the participation of key stakeholders such as policymakers, buffer organisations, leaders of (higher) education institutions, teaching staff, employers, and students. This cooperation should ideally be guided by a national regulatory or policy framework for flexible learning. It can do so by establishing standards and norms, as well as giving financing to assist schools in incorporating chances for flexible learning into their study programmes. (IIEP UNESCO Michaela Martin and Ana Godonoga).

Many nations have developed lifelong learning strategies to underline that knowledge-based societies require chances for learning throughout the life span to achieve positive economic and social outcomes. Lifelong learning has a 'lifelong' as well as a 'life-wide' dimension (Clemans, 2015). In the long-term individuals should continue learning throughout their lives for professional or personal reasons, and this learning can occur not just in structured and formal settings, but also in non-formal contexts. The life-wide dimension emphasises that learning opportunities are also available in informal contexts, such as an individual's interactions with family, the workplace, and the community. Lifelong learning policies are frequently used as broad frameworks that outline what various sectors (including

higher education) and stakeholders can do to increase learning opportunities for people at various stages of their life. They frequently advocate for more educational system flexibility and the availability of routes fit for all sorts of learners, including non-traditional populations. Thus, policies promoting lifelong learning are firmly aligned with the notion of bringing more flexibility and numerous paths into education systems to fulfill a variety of learning demands. They may be used as frameworks to help higher education institutions develop their lifelong learning methods and build more student-centered and flexible learning environments. According to the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, at least 52 nations throughout the world have policies or strategies for lifelong learning (UNESCO-UIL, n.d.b)

1.1FLEXIBLE LEARNING:

- Cassidy et al. (2016) defined Flexible Learning (FL) as a pedagogical approach allowing for flexibility of time, place, and audience, including but not solely focused on the use of technologies.
- The teaching and learning process online is driven by the needs of the teachers and the learners. This is considered the development of online learning with the use of technologies for it offered cost savings for the learners, teachers, and the institution, increased flexibility of teaching and learning, and improved access to education (Kirkwood & Price, 2013).
- Flexible learning expands the choice of what, when, where, and how people learn. It supports different styles of learning, including e-learning (DEST).
- A generic term that covers all those situations where learners have some say in how, where, and when learning takes place – whether within the context of traditional institution-centered courses or in non-traditional contexts such as open learning, distance learning, CAT schemes, wider-access courses, or continuing professional development. (Ellington, 1997 p. 4).
- Flexible provision of higher education refers here to a mode of provision that provides learners with guided choice, in many domains, achieved through the employment of various strategies including the use of learning and teaching techniques and technologies and the adoption of policies affecting choices for learners. (‘The Effectiveness of Models of Flexible Provision of Higher Education (2001), DEST, Australian Government) (Department of Education Employment

and Workplace Relations, 2008)

- Flexible learning is a movement away from a situation in which key decisions about learning dimensions are made in advance by the instructor or institution, towards a situation where the learner has a range of options from which to choose concerning these key dimensions. (Collis &Moonen, 2001, p. 10).
- Flexible Learning is a set of educational philosophies and systems, concerned with providing learners with increased choice, convenience, and personalisation to suit the learner. In particular, flexible learning provides learners with choices about where, when, and how learning occurs. Sometimes also referredto as personalized learning. Flexible learning is a term often used in New Zealand and Australia (Shurville et al, 2008).

1.2FLEXIBLE EDUCATION:

Flexible learning structures are educational approaches or systems that adjust to students' different requirements and preferences. These structures allow learners to control their learning by accommodating varied learning styles, speeds, and surroundings. flexible learning frameworks might include online, blended, or hybrid learning.

Flexible learning pathways are educational strategies that provide students with numerous options and opportunities to pursue their learning objectives in a personalised and adaptable manner. These pathways enable students to tailor their learning experiences to their specific needs, interests, and learning pace. Flexible learning pathways are intended to accommodate various learning styles and preferences.

A choice-based credit system (CBCS) helps students learn in a way that is centered on them by letting them choose courses based on their interests and goals and tailor their education to their specific interests and career goals. It encourages multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary learning, promotes critical thinking, decision-making, and accountability, and lets students choose from a vast array of courses offered by the institution. It also makes it easier to transfer credits and get credit for what they have already learned, which helps students who want to transfer or already have relevant experience. CBCS must be put into place with careful planning and management.

The time has come for us to shift to newer methods and mechanisms of imparting education to the

youth in general. There is a lack of an 'Interdisciplinary approach' and neglect for 'value-based courses'. The solution for such a problem is to provide a choice for students to study multiple subjects and specialize in interdisciplinary areas. Thus, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has initiated several steps to include innovation and improvement in coursecurricula, and the introduction of various types of examination, evaluation & assessment systems. To allow flexibility in the education system, so that students depending on their interests and aims can choose interdisciplinary and skill-based courses, a choice-based credit system (CBCS), is adopted. The choice-based credit system not only offers opportunities to learn core subjects but also opportunities to discipline unrelated subjects and explore additional avenues of learning beyond the core subjects for holistic development. Quality is the major concern of the present higher education which can be judged and assessed only by the universally acclaimed system of evaluation, and this could be possible through the CBCS. CBCS is essential for Higher Education as this system increases the sincerity among the students as they are preferring to learn the subjects of their choice.(Santu Biswas, 2022)

NEED FOR FLEXIBLE EDUCATION:

- Flexibility enhances the resilience of education systems. Whether students are entering, moving through, leaving, or returning to higher education, the more flexible the learning pathways are, the more likely it is that systems will be able to adapt to change and new challenges. (Michaela Martin**,** IIEP Researcher,2020)
- To reach non-conventional students**.**
- Students request greater flexibility related to time, place, and mode of study (Casey& Wilson, 2005).
- Institutions provide a range of options for students to study (Nicoll, 1997).
- Flexible options cater to a larger and more diverse student body (Normand & Littlejohn, 2006).
- A response to the perceived needs of industry and employers and to boost the supply of graduates to occupations and professions where shortages of practitioners have been identified (Morrison &Pittsfield, 2006).
- To respond to changing circumstances and provide just-in-time learning for students (Nunan,

1996).

- To extend learning opportunities to conventional school leavers who may not enter university (Casey & Wilson, 2005).

1.3 FLEXIBLE LEARNING: NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY2020 PERSPECTIVE

It might be challenging for young people to switch from one learning pathway to another under rigid systems. Even if they realise that their original option isn't the best one for them, they can discover that they are still limited to it. This may contribute to them quitting school.

For young people, the repetition of lessons can be demotivating. The requirement to repeat material they have already learned in their previous course can discourage learners who are allowed to switch courses but must start from the beginning.

Young people who have other obligations can still work toward their desired qualification thanks to the flexibility in the delivery and timing of learning opportunities, or they can pick up where they left off if they have previously dropped out.

Household obligations, low family income, health issues, remote housing, gender disparities, and early marriages are just a few of the factors that contribute to our nation's low Gross Enrolment Ratio (**ger**) and dropout rates. If education was offered to students at their convenience and with a flexible mode of delivery, this problem may be greatly reduced.

Choosing a course of study leading to the award of a certificate, diploma, or degree, flexibility in learning is crucial. There are times when students must abandon their schooling, for a variety of reasons, halfway. Credit clearance data for such unfinished academic programmes are still missing. Some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) use contingency techniques by letting the learner accept a certification at a lesser level.

Zero-year loss to students if they leave between terms; such strict limitations must be eliminated. One of the main goals of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 is to improve Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), which will be accomplished by lowering the drop-out rate. Lifelong learning is made easier through flexible learning. These goals can be met using the multiple entry/exit system theory and the flexibility of learning from anywhere, at any time.

The NEP, 2020 highlights the significance of flexible learning by stating that innovative and flexible

curricular designs will enable creative interdisciplinary study combinations and would provide many entry and exit points, removing the strict barriers that are currently in place. These would provide new opportunities for students to select and study the subject(s) of their choice, while also allowing them to change the HEI to suit their preferences, convenience, or needs. The NEP, 2020 anticipates alterations to degree programme lengths and structures, as well as the creation of an Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) to facilitate distributed and flexible teaching-learning between and within degree-granting HEIs. The ABC will function as a formal system of credit recognition, accumulation, transfer, and redemption. The Ministry of Education (MoE) and UGC created and maintained the ABC, a digital, virtual, and online entity, as an academic service mechanism to help students become its academic account holders. To advance this, NEP, 2020 encourages rigorous research-based specialisation and chances for multidisciplinary work in major multidisciplinary universities, including in academia, government, and interdisciplinary thinking. Additionally, it states that the National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) "must be described by such learning outcomes in terms of such higher education qualifications leading to a degree/diploma/certificate.

The undergraduate degree should be three or four years long, have several entry and exit points during that time, and certifications during different exit points. For instance, a diploma after two years of study, a certificate after one year in a discipline or field, including vocational and professional fields, or a bachelor's degree following a three-year programme. The four-year multidisciplinary Bachelor'sprogramme, however, is the preferred option because it gives students the chance to experience a full range of holistic and multidisciplinary education in addition to focusing on major and minor subjects according to their preferences. Guidelines for Multiple Entry and Exit in Academic Programmes Offered in Higher Education Institutions. The four-year programme may also lead to a degree in Research if the student completes a rigorous research project in the major area(s) of study as specified by the HEI.

For the master's programmes, the HEI will have the flexibility to offer different designs:

a) A two-year programme with the second year devoted entirely to research for those who have completed the three-year bachelor's programme.

b) A one-year master's programme for students who are completing a four-year bachelor's programme

with Research; and

c) An integrated five-year Bachelor's/Master's programme with an option to exit at the end of the third year with a bachelor's degree, with an entry to a master's programme in another HEI.

The guidelines of the proposed multiple entry and exit option will serve the following objectives:

• Remove rigid boundaries and facilitate new possibilities for learners.

• Curtail the dropout rate and improve GER

• Offer creative combinations of disciplines of study that would enable multiple entry and exit points.

• Offer flexibility in curriculum and novel course options to students in addition to discipline-specific specializations.

• Offer different designs of the master's programme.

• Enable credit accumulation and transfer along with the provision of evaluation and validation of non-formal and informal learning for the award of a degree and encourage lifelong learning.

• Facilitate earned credits when the learner resumes his/her programmes of study.

1.4 NEED OF THE STUDY:

- Flexible learning is not a path of least resistance or an easy way out. Like other study modes, flexible learning must be sufficiently challenging, reflecting the level and field of study. Barnett's (2014).
- In another study undertaken in the context of the Philippines, Gocotano, Jerodiaz, Banggay, Rey Nasibog, and Go (2021) argued for a balanced approach when implementing flexible learning, particularly in the use of technologies.
- Parrish et al (2021a, 2021b), It was no surprise that the feedback from students was largely negative. The authors cited a report from the World Economic Forum that found that, while critical thinking and problem-solving skills were the most developed, effective social and interpersonal skills were lagging.
- To succeed, Talbot et al. (2020) emphasise that the integration of flexible learning and work-based learning must ultimately be pragmatic, which implies that such approaches depend on the requirements and goals of the institutions concerned.
- Making students employment ready:

Nottingham (2016) emphasises the importance of work-based learning. This viewpoint is helpful since students who are stationed in either the United States or abroad provide a considerable opportunity to expand their understanding of flexible learning in their place of employment or engage in significant work-related activities while pursuing higher education. The author specifically identifies three main perspectives—discipline-centered, learner-centered, and employer-centered—that might guide the integration of flexible learning with work-based learning. By considering each viewpoint, educators and HEIs will have the opportunity to create new pedagogies that may be suitable for full-time, part-time, and distance learners as well as those who need work placements or internships (combining flexible learning with work-based learning).

- Encouraging lifelong learning journey:

  According to a paper by Gronseth and Hutchins (2020), workplace flexible learning is not always successful. The promotion of developing favourable attitudes and behaviours toward lifelong learning and self-directed learning is essential since these routines must be formed before students begin their jobs.

- The earlier research show that there is a need to study the implementation of flexible learning structure and technology integration in higher studies. The lack of a coherent approach from the government suggests that there needs to be a deeper understanding and better grounding of what is required from flexible learning.

Implementing such a framework at the national level is a difficult challenge. As a result, research is required.

1.5**Lifelong Learning:**A person's development after formal education. It involves the continuing development of knowledge and skills that people experience after formal education and throughout their lives. Lifelong learning builds on prior learning as it expands knowledge and skills in depth and breadth.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Education plays a strong role in building a nation; education decides the future of the nation and the destiny of its people. The impact is going to be a durable one in terms of the growth and development of the state and subject. The role of education and its importance can't be ignored in today's scenario.

The expansion and development are seen if we compare the pre-independence and post-independence eras. After 34 years Indian Govt. is going to change the way India will study, this is the third amendment to the education policy. There are several changes planned in the new National Education Policy 2020 that may affect all the stakeholders (KalyaniPawan, 2020).

The objective of the policy is to prepare the country to face the challenges of the next decades of the 21st century and make India a global hub in education with multidisciplinary and liberal education, Aithal, P. S. et al in their paper highlighted important aspects of new education policy and compared them with the existing conventional education system. NEP 2020 emphasized promoting innovations and is expected to have varied implications for the Indian teaching system. It has also laid down the framework for its effective implementation. Jha, P. et al (2020) has discussed the drawbacks of the New Education Policy, 2020. The present NEP is the third in its series that India is going to implement. It took thirty-four years to formulate it since the last one in 1986. The policy has many relevant considerations regarding how to provide quality education of global standard, bring equality in education and increase the participation of private players**.** Suryavanshi, S. (2020**)** has stressed upon development of teachers in Indian universities.

On the Chinese university model. It emphasized that autonomy should be provided to college and university teachers to decide their teaching methodology and support should be provided for research and innovation. The proposal of operational and financial autonomy to HEIs is a futuristic step ahead. As per Kumar, K., et al (2020), National Education Policy 2020 will prove to be a milestone for Indian Education. NEP-2020 provides a comprehensive framework for primary education to include teaching business & technical education. It also got provision for internet-based e-leanings which is a paradigm shift from the conventional system. The essence of NEP is access, equity, affordability, responsibility, and quality tothe United Nations' sustainable goals. NEP is not free from loopholes, but it has taken deep insight into the global scenario. It should be implemented with great caution to address the challenges that are required for fostering quality education for all. Deb, P. (2020) discussed the Indian ethos and cultural values in teaching that got their place in National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

2.1 Technology Integration:

The desire to maximise the benefits of technology can sometimes be the driving force behind the

adoption and expansion of flexible learning techniques. For instance, Hu and Spiro (2021) examine the potential benefits of extended massive open online courses (xMOOCs) and connectivity in their article. A platform for MOOCs (c-MOOCs). MOOCs are relatively common and are offered by websites like edX, Coursera, and Udacity. Platforms that are primarily intended to bring people together for learning are distinguished by the term "MOOCs." Social media, blogs, and other similar features that encourage student interaction are frequently seen in c MOOCs.All participants in MOOCs are treated as teachers and learners, in contrast to xMOOCS, which depend on an instructor to arrange and guide the learning.

In their article, Hu and Spiro (2021) discussed how xMOOC and cMOOC may be used in conjunction to improve flexible learning by using the cognitive flexibility theory as a lens. According to the theory of cognitive flexibility, for learners to be successful in their learning, they must be ready to pick out, modify, and integrate their prior knowledge and experience in a way that enables them to handle unfamiliar situations and difficulties. Hu and Spiro (2021) contend that MOOC and MOOCs enable flexible learning and student learning successes by drawing on this approach. They contend that allowing pupils to learn in poorly organised domains (as opposed to well-structured domains) improves student learning.

The implementation of flexible learning modes (including flexible curriculum and flexible delivery) has been favourably received in solving difficulties relating to student participation, engagement, and achievement. However, diverse methods for flexible learning have not yet been thoroughly investigated. Li, Yang, Chu, Zainuddin, and Zhang's (2020) study specifically looked at the efficacy of a "mixed synchronous learning" approach in a Hong Kong setting.

In a study by Ramrez-Montoya and Ramrez Hernández, the foundation of an integrated pedagogical approach was also clear (2016). Their study reinforced the necessity to concentrate on how education is designed clearly and strategically to make maximum use of the chosen technologies, much like the other publications evaluated. Of course, the essential components of the student's learning environment, such as the academic curriculum and material, as well as the tools and resources, are necessary for any curriculum to be effective.

For a cogent and complementary application, the coupling of flexible and adaptive learning demands a

systems approach. To maximise the usefulness of adaptability and flexibility in HEIs and students to improve student performance, it is crucial to adopt a systems approach when combining adaptive technology with learning analytics. This is highlighted in a review by Martin, Chen, and Westine (2020). Martin et al. (2020) conducted their research to address the shortcomings of earlier evaluations that mostly focused on the learner model and concerned knowledge and abilities, traits, preferences, motivation, emotional elements, and dispositional aspects. The instructional model and the content model for modifying instructional content were both highlighted by the authors in their review.The learner model describes the cognitive, affective, and behavioural traits of the learners.

2.2The role of educators:

Lawton (2019) argued that content and the role of the educator are crucial. She highlighted the vital role of educators in making the content available to students and organised to allow them to learn asynchronously and, as a result, enable synchronous interactions to be maximised.

Naidu (2018) emphasised the crucial role that educators play in recognising and seizing opportunities provided by technology, both emerging and maturing (for example, given the potential cost efficiency and perhaps more widespread use that promotes interoperability). The author contends that educators may contribute to ongoing innovation by experimenting with and implementing technologies that facilitate flexible learning. These novel concepts may alter how academic institutions and educators conceptualise and carry out open and flexible learning.

2.3Equity and Inclusion in flexible learning:

The article by Adams et al (2019) provides a powerful example of inclusivity as a mechanism. Technology interventions are crucial, and procedures make it possible for technology to be suitable and "fit." The "inclusivity" mechanism entails modifying the curriculum and pedagogical methods to make them appropriate for students with neurodiverse learning styles.

HEIs and educators must simultaneously implement development programmes for their teaching staff. Supporting neurodiverse pupils is a journey, despite the cliché. According to research, HEIs have a lot to learn about various neurodiverse conditions, such as ADHD, Asperger's, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and Tourette's, as well as how these conditions affect students' learning and well-being, how teaching staff members and the university as a whole can support them, and what flexible

learning means for them.

However, these challenges can be addressed if principles of inclusivity guide the design and implementation of flexible learning. In addition, staff and institutions need to maintain a developmental approach so that teaching approaches can be kept informed by discoveries made by research in equality, diversity, and inclusivity in the context of flexible learning.

2.4 Stress on the Students in India and the Flexibility of the American Education System:(S. Vijay Kumar, 2012)

Indian education and social systems are very hard on kids and completely ignore their feelings, opinions, and ambitions. Kids are pushed to study from the age of 3 and non-performers are treated as dolts and ostracized by parents and society. The preferred choice of learning and teaching is memorizing. The memorization approach to study does not allow and teach kids to think independently. The social and educational systems in India are exceedingly harsh on children and utterly disregard their emotions, beliefs, and aspirations. From the age of three, children are pressured to study, and underachievers are labeled as idiots and excluded by society and parents. Memorization is the method of learning and teaching that is most popular. The memory method of learning prevents and teaches children to think independently. On the other side, the American educational system's greatest asset is its adaptability. In high school and college, students have a wide variety of classes and courses to select from. This implies that individuals can switch their major, or area of study, in the middle of their college career. This typically means that American pupils are exposed to a wider range of disciplines and as a result, are better known about their employment possibilities and opportunities. The American educational system emphasis the growth of each student's unique abilities and fosters communication among students from an early age. As a result, compared to people from other nations, most Americans are much better at communicating their ideas.

The US educational system's greatest strength is adaptability. Flexibility is difficult to find in the Indian educational system, yet it enables students to understand themselves better in terms of their aptitude, capabilities, and interests. Thus, while Indian education is compulsory, the US system emphasis freedom of choice (study what you want to). In India, parents make all the decisions, and children are not allowed to exercise their judgment. Our education develops slaves, but American

education generates inventors, says Abraham Lincoln if flexibility is not permitted. In Indian education, "creativity" needs to be encouraged. Due to the critical mass, they have, graduate programmes in the US are far ahead of those in most other nations.

The outstanding flexibility and mobility of American education, which is based on the credit system, is its greatest strength. There is a credit transfer system in place at all public and private universities in the US. Students may transfer the pertinent credit if they are from a recognised institution. Students can transfer a lot of credit between programmes regardless of whether they major in business, communications, or international relations because most general education courses are offered in the first few years of the programme. This also means that a student won't have to repeat these courses if they switch their course of study from, say, psychology to international relations because a large portion of their credits can be transferred from one programme to the other, this flexibility is a great asset, says Dr. Antonopoulos.

2.6 Flexible Learning Pathways:

The importance of Flexible Learning Pathways in higher education is emphasised by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Education 2030 implementation agenda. They are defined by Education 2030 as "entry and re-entry points at all ages and educational levels, strengthened links between formal and non-formal structures, and recognition, validation, and accreditation of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education." (UNESCO, 2015: 33)

Transferability, or permeability, can be horizontal or vertical, according to these definitions. Horizontal permeability refers to the ability to transfer knowledge between learning opportunities that may differ in content but is delivered at the same level of education (Spöttl, 2013). It also includes the concept of transitioning from one occupation to another. Vertical permeability is associated with the idea that all learners, regardless of whether they pursued vocational or general education in secondary school, have the opportunity to continue their education in an academic programme at the tertiary level (Spöttl, 2013).This may imply that candidates with a vocational background must complete a bridging programme or meet other requirements before enrolling in a higher education academic programme. It also means that there are no "dead ends" in learning and that there are options for transferring between

different types of provision. As a result, permeability refers not only to entry routes to higher education, but also to transfer routes within higher education that allow learners to build on prior learning, whether it occurred at school, at work, or through leisure activities (CEDEFOP, 2012)

2.6.1 Indian context:

Case study 1 (CHOICE-BASED CREDIT SYSTEM):Students at Bharathiar University (BU) can choose supportive and elective courses from other departments through the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS). At the master's level, CBCS allows for interdisciplinarity, and students can choose from a list of prescribed courses for credit. Students must complete the required number of core, elective, and supportive courses approved by the Board of Studies. However, CBCS has not been implemented consistently across departments at BU. Furthermore, credit transfer between programmes is uncommon. Each programme has its own Board that designs and approves the syllabus for each course within the programme, and they are the only ones who can approve credit transfers. Credit transfer and mobility between affiliated colleges of the university, on the other hand, is possible for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.(IIEP UNESCO)

Case Study 2 (Transfer): TANSCHE (Tamil Nadu State Higher Education Council) aims to ensure uniform curricula in all universities under its jurisdiction to facilitate inter-institution transfers. TANSCHE is currently working to provide equivalence and course recognition for various state university programmes. Bharathiar University (BU) has contributed course and programme descriptions to this initiative. Once implemented, this initiative will allow transfers between state HEIs. Some credits obtained from other universities via any mode are considered for course waivers at BU's School of Distance Education (SDE) on a case-by-case basis and approved by the Board of Studies.At IIT-Delhi, transfers are facilitated through a 'branch change'. In the first year of an undergraduate programme, students study a broad curriculum and can take courses from various branches. They can change branches after the first year if they have a good GPA. Even though IIT-Delhi allocates about 15% of seats to branch transfer students, only 5% of students benefit from this option.(IIEP UNESCO).

2.6.2 Global context:

- In Estonia, for example, the government has created an integrated Higher Education Act that

incorporates the university and non-university subsectors into a single piece of legislation. Before this, the university subsector was governed by the Universities Act and the non-university subsector by the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act. The new law, which went into effect in February 2019, aims to improve the coordination of academic and vocational/professional education and training (Government of Estonia, 2019).

- Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 on Higher Education, which serves as a 10-year strategic framework for the development of Malaysia's higher education sector. The framework envisions a higher education system that is "less focused on traditional, academic pathways and more focused on much-needed technical and vocational training" (Ministry of Education of Malaysia, 2015: 11). It also lays the groundwork for the creation of a framework for prior learning recognition and the creation of pathways for entry and re-entry into the higher education system.
- The Flemish Community of Belgium, through its 2004 Flexible Learning Paths Act, takes a system-wide approach to provide flexible learning pathways (OECD, 2019). In this context, study programmes are made up of a collection of stand-alone modules, the completion of which results in a credit certificate. In the Flemish system, students can pursue a degree contract, a credit contract, or an examination contract. Students who intend to complete a programme of study and obtain a degree must sign a degree contract. The credit contract is intended for those who want to enroll in only specific modules and obtain specific credit certificates. The exam contract grants learners the right to take exams under the terms and conditions specified by the board of the higher education institution.
- The need to provide learners with pathways into higher education and the workforce has been a national imperative in South Africa, as emphasised in the 2013 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training and the 2017 Articulation Policy for the South African Post-School Education and Training System (South African Qualifications Authority, 2017). The latter establishes the legislative and regulatory framework for all education providers in the country. It aims to ensure that 'articulation occurs within and between the three NQF [National Qualifications Framework] sub-frameworks, that institutions collaborate to develop learning and work pathways, and that learners are supported as they follow their individual learning and work pathways.' (1)

(South African Qualifications Authority, 2017).

- In Finland, for example, Prime Minister JuhaSipilä's Government established 26 projects to implement its policy goals in 2015, one of which aims to strengthen linkages and permeability between upper secondary education, higher education, and the labour market (Government of Finland, 2015). To accomplish this, the government intends to make transfers between and within educational levels more flexible, reform the entrance examination process to higher education, introduce a new study path in higher education (professional specialisation studies), update qualification requirements in the public sector, and improve collaboration between secondary and higher education.

SECTION3: PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Many nations have developed lifelong learning strategies to underline that knowledge-based societies require chances for learning throughout the life span to achieve positive economic and social outcomes. Lifelong learning has a 'lifelong' as well as a 'life-wide' dimension (Clemans, 2015). They frequently advocate for more educational system flexibility and the availability of routes fit for all sorts of learners, including non-traditional populations. Thus, policies promoting lifelong learning are firmly aligned with the notion of bringing more flexibility and numerous paths into education systems to fulfill a variety of learning demands. They may be used as frameworks to help higher education institutions develop their lifelong learning methods and build more student-centered and flexible learning environments. According to UNESCO, 52 nations throughout the world have policies or strategies for lifelong learning (UNESCO-UIL, n.d.b)

According to a review of the literature, there isvery few research found in India focusing on lifelonglearning to build more student-centered and flexible learning environments. and challenges in implementing in higher education, which is UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal no. 4. Thus the researcher was motivated to take the topic for research as**" A study on the Adoption of Flexible Learning Structure in Higher Educational Institutions"**

SECTION 4: OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study the adoption of flexible learning structuresin higher education.
2. To identify the role of technology integration in flexible learning.

3. To analyse the challenges faced in the adoption of a flexible learning system in higher education.
4. To provide suggestions for the implementation of the Multiple Entry-Exit System and Credit transfer.

SECTION 5: HYPOTHESIS:

H1: It is easy to adopt a flexible learning system in higher education.

H2: Technology has a significant role to play in the integration of flexible learning structures.

H3: There are significant challenges in the adoption of Multiple Entry and Exit systems.

SECTION 6: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

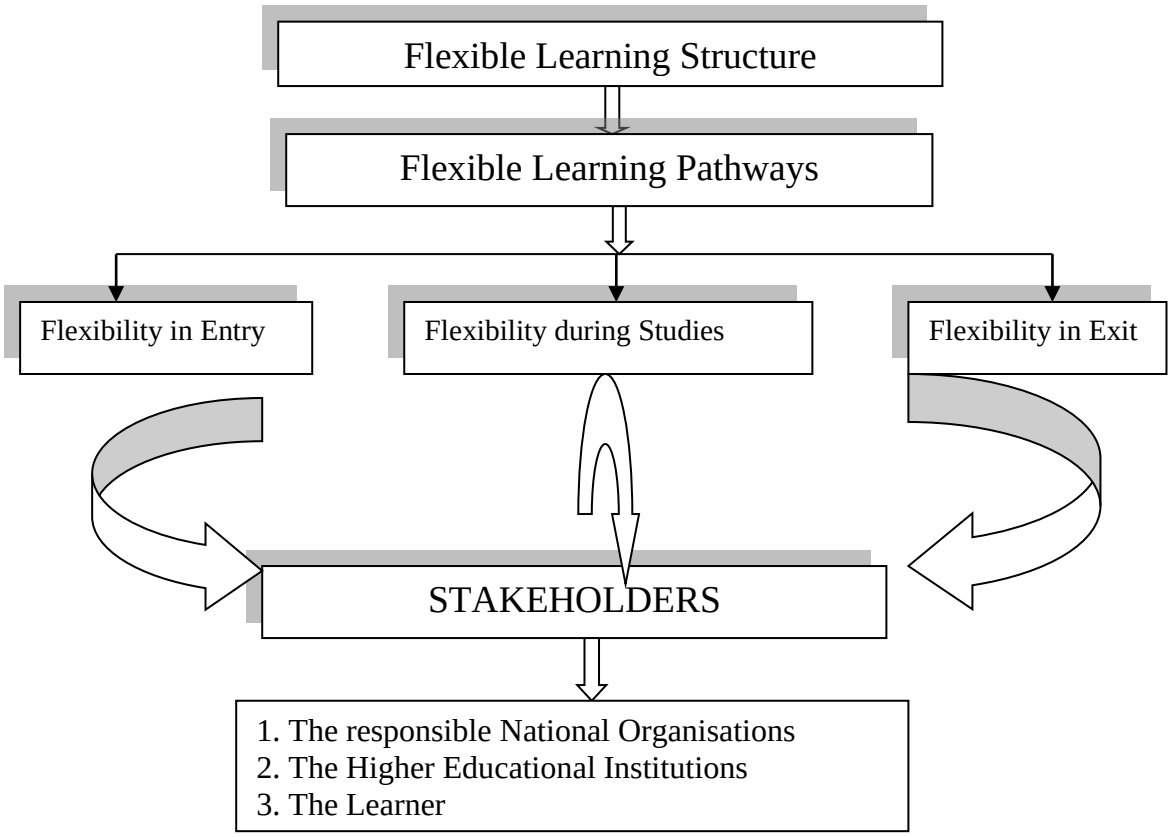

Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of the study

SECTION 7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

7.1. ResearchDesign: The research will be exploratory and descriptive. It will be a mixed design, both qualitative and quantitative.

7.2. **Selection of State**: Uttar Pradesh because it has a large number of universities as per UGC it has 74 universities including Centre, State, and Deemed to be universities.

7.3. Sampling Unit: The sample will be drawn from UCG-approved colleges, Central, State, and Deemed universities, which will include professors, associate professors, and assistant professors

having more than 5 years of experience and the students studying in these Institutions.

7.4. Sampling Technique:

Multistage sampling will be used:

2 clusters are taken from the districts of Uttar Pradesh, which have higher institutions greater than or equal to 30. These clusters are taken based on purposive sampling.

Slovin's formula is used here for calculating sample size. It is as follows:

$n\text{-}N/(1+Ne^2)$, where

n=The sample size

N=The Population Size (9999)

e=The margin of error (0.05%)

as a 95% confidence level is taken

Working of formula

$n=9999/ (1+9999*(0.05)^2)$

$=9999/25.9325$

$=384.72$

$= 385$ (Sample Size)

The research will include multistage sampling

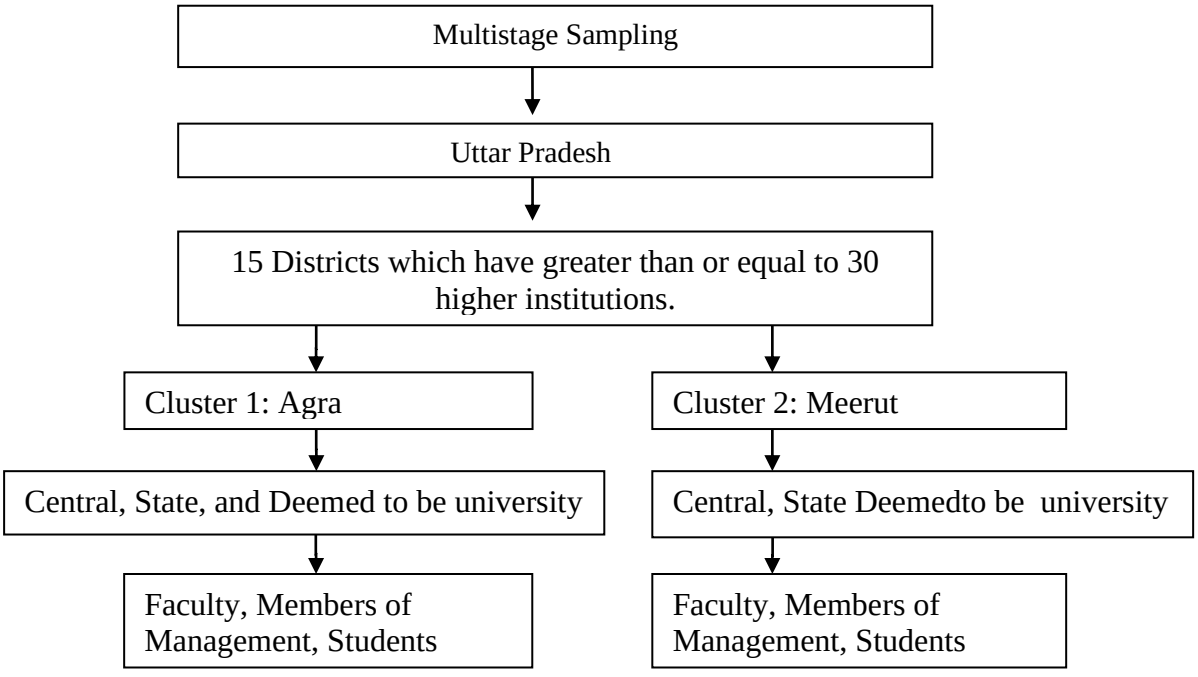
Multistage Sampling
Uttar Pradesh
15 Districts which have greater than or equal to 30 higher institutions.
Cluster 1: Agra
Cluster 2: Meerut
Central, State, and Deemed to be university
Central, State Deemedto be university
Faculty, Members of Management, Students
Faculty, Members of Management, Students

Fig. 2: Multistage Sampling

7.5. Sources of Data: The primary data will be collected through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and observations.

The secondary sources of data will be collected from published Journals, papers, Reports, Books, Blogs, Periodicals, Websites, and other online resources and policy documents.

7.6. Data Collection Techniques: For in-depth analysis,Data will be collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observation.

7.7. Statistical Tool for Analysis: descriptive statistics, correlation, ANOVA, and qualitative tools.

SECTION 8: MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS:

1. The innovative Academic Bank of Credit and Multiple Entry and Exit System will help reduce the dropout rate and boost the Gross Enrolment Ratio.
2. With the adoption of Flexible Learning Pathways, the learner will be able to earn a certificate, diploma, or degree. There will be no loss of a year of the learner and will also enhance the psychological functioning of the student (self-efficacy, feeling of competency, achievement).
3. It will make the learner experience multidisciplinary and holistic education with the subjects of their own choice. The adoption of a Flexible Learning Structure will also make the learner employment ready.

SECTION 9: PROPOSED CHAPTERS:

Chapter 1-Introduction

Chapter 2-Review of the literature.

Chapter 3- Research Methodology

Chapter 4- Finding and Analysis

Chapter 5- Conclusion and Recommendation

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Appendix

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